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ABSTRACT

An examination of the principles and techniques of oral testing in British university-level final examinations in modern languages discusses: (1) the shortcomings of present oral testing procedures; (2) the theoretical controversy surrounding the design and value of oral proficiency tests, arising from research in English as a second language teaching; (3) a proposed test model; and (4) the relationship between an oral final examination and the language curriculum. The study recommends: increased weighting of oral language in the final examination; extension of the oral component to include a presentation on a prepared topic, a formal question/answer or interpreting exercise, and a general personal discussion; an additional oral exercise to test receptive and oral summarizing skills; two examiners per student, changing at regular intervals; integration of the tested skills in the formally assessed coursework; and increased responsibility placed on students for exploitation of materials and evaluation. (MSE)

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THE EVALUATION OF ORAL/AURAL SKILLS WITHIN THE BA FINALS EXAMINATION: ANALYSIS AND INTERIM PROPOSALS

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THE EVALUATION OF ORAL/AURAL SKILLS WITHIN THE BA FINALS EXAMINATION: ANALYSIS AND INTERIM PROPOSALS

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At a time when advances are being made at the pre 16-plus level and when universities are endeavouring to diversify the range of skills practised in their language courses, there has been very little discussion or published research on the structure of the finals oral examination. The status of the oral test as a finals paper remains high; yet with certain notable exceptions such as the experiments with interpreting, its format within the context of the BA course has rarely been seriously questioned. Neither has there been extensive debate about the necessary interdependence of a more communicatively based curriculum and the assessment of oral proficiency, as distinct from other communicatively based skills.

Nonetheless, several generally recognised features of current developments within foreign language teaching might be thought to make such a debate desirable. Among these, one should mention in particular the move towards more 'task-orientated' language learning within higher education, the likelihood of pupils' increased exposure to oral approaches at secondary level, the need to produce teachers who are fully proficient in oral/aual skills, and, more generally, a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo. The Bradford conference has therefore provided a timely opportunity to carry out a mise au point which, for the converted at least, probably requires no further justification.

Once embarked upon, a reevaluation of the principles and techniques of oral examining at 'finals' level demands an investigation of four main areas of concern:

1. the shortcomings of present procedures.
2. the theoretical controversy surrounding the design and even the value of oral proficiency tests which has arisen primarily out of research in the area of EFL/ESL teaching.
3. a proposed test model applicable within the current framework.
4. the relationship between such a test and an integrated language curriculum.

1. PRESENT PROCEDURE

It is in fact by no means clear that the present format of the finals orals examination is intrinsically deficient. It is acknowledged (Wilds, 1975) that a candidate's overall language proficiency can be orally assessed as effectively in five minutes as in thirty. It is even suggested (Callaway, 1980) that an

untrained native speaker, basing his judgement principally on 'accent', is as reliable an assessor as a trained examiner who systematically analyses the different components of oral performance. No doubt these findings confirm the long-held suspicions of many experienced oral examiners that the test is often unnecessarily extended. But to accept the above findings at face value is to overlook some of the limitations inherent in the experiments concerned. It also means making the very questionable assumption that the purposes of the tests in the US are no different from those of the British finals oral examination; strictly speaking, this is not the case. Callaway's 1980 experiment at Southern Illinois University was based only on reading, and the gauge of overall proficiency was limited in validity; Wilds' 1975 assertions, tentative in scope, applied to tests devised by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) for implementation by all US government agencies. They were designed as proficiency tests and were largely syllabus independent.

The conditions governing a university finals paper are different; under these circumstances the oral is more than a proficiency test. It should be designed in such a way that its 'backwash effect' motivates students to practise and develop their oral competence in a variety of registers in order to perform a specific set of tasks. Irrespective of the findings mentioned above, the nature of the oral paper and the teaching and design of the course itself should be seen as an interrelated question.

From the point of view of its interrelationship with the curriculum, the present finals oral examination is almost entirely 'open-ended', consisting as it generally does of a reading passage followed by a discussion on a variety of unspecified subjects. As outlined, its design does not reflect performance objectives nor does it provide guidelines for practice or tuition. The intrinsic drawbacks of what can be referred to as the 'standard oral test' (SOT) are generally recognised, if not openly discussed. The first of these is its potential unreliability; as far as I know, no controlled experiments correlating oral performance levels and overall language proficiency, or comparing the assessments of individual and paired examiners (cf Mullen, 1980 and Dyson, 1972) have yet been carried out in this country at post-secondary level. Research currently being untertaken on behalf of the DES by Peter Dyson of the Language Teaching Centre at the University of Oxford promises to fill what is, at present, a serious lacuna.

One doubt about the SOT's reliability derives from the different degrees of emphasis placed on individual factors of oral performance: accuracy, fluency, accent, content, personality, phatic authenticity, register variety, lexical variations, comprehension and so on. An easily recognisable source of divergent judgements relates to content. Certain oral examiners are known to have preconceptions about what ought to constitute the domains of knowledge covered by a university education regardless of whether these have formed part of the course. It is not always obvious that the knowledge demanded should necessarily have impinged on the student's experience. This is not simply bad examining; it is a defect in the design of the test.

The SOT's validity, 'direct' or 'indirect' is also open to question. Clark (1975) has defined a language proficiency test as

any measurement procedure aimed at determining the examinee's ability to receive or transmit information in the test language for some pragmatically useful purpose with a real-life setting.[1]

There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that many university candidates find it all but impossible to hold authentic or meaningful discussions of complex philosophical or literary issues in an examination. For those who do, the highly successful ones, the question of their ability to transfer their competence to the 'real-life setting' does not arise. But for the remainder, there is no obvious relationship between coursework, test, and the 'pragmatically useful purpose' for which they should theoretically be able to use their linguistic skills.

Fuller analysis and discussion of the problems involved in oral testing are required. It should then be possible to establish a basis for devising more self-evidently reliable tests. If such tests also had greater 'face-validity', there seems little doubt that they would have a more significant effect than at present on course design, student motivation, and patterns of learning.

2. AREAS OF THEORETICAL CONTROVERSY

Following Alderson (1981), it can be said that the first main area of contention in the evaluation of oral proficiency concerns the relationship in test design between theory and content, between **construct validity** and **content validity**. Need the design of an oral test conform to features imposed by a given theory of language? To argue that it must is to argue in favour of **construct validity**. For example, a proficiency test which was 'construct-validated' in terms of a transformational-generative model of language might include a reading test which compared examinees' levels of comprehension after reading two texts with two distinct degrees of embedding. On the other hand, should a proficiency test not be validated in terms of its **content**, that is should it not reflect the 'real-life' features of the proficiency it seeks to assess? As Alderson puts it: 'The question is whether tests are mirrors of reality or **constructed** instruments from a theory of what language is.'[2]

Alderson subsequently resolves the problem by arguing that tests measure **performance** regardless of their underlying theoretical presuppositions. Yet the fact remains that many oral tests, including the FSI interview test and the British GCE 'A' level oral examinations are at least in part rooted in construct validation. The GCE oral examinations for example specify that certain syntactic structures should be tested and that the candidate's overall performance be assessed accordingly. This section of the test is valid in relation to a structural theory of language. The same is true of the recommendation that controlled interpreting be used in the FSI interview to verify knowledge of points of grammar.[3] Elsewhere in this test, however, content validity takes the upper hand. Evidently, construct validity and content validity are not mutually exclusive within the same test; but at least their distinctness as validation procedures is preserved. The problem with the SOT is that the test is valid in neither area.

The question of 'content' or 'face' validity is based on the predictive value of the test, its relationship with the future experience of the candidate. This is a central issue to which we shall return. At the same time, as we have seen, the issue of a test's predictability or unpredictability refers backwards to the course itself. Predictability has two facets, both of which affect course design. The first of these concerns content. It appears obvious that an oral test should assess material which has been included in a programme of study. Yet the 'SOT' frequently only includes general instructions such as those that questions may be asked about the dissertation that forms part of the degree or about books on the course.

The second aspect of the question of predictability concerns test design itself. It would seem to be a logical feature of design that the format of a test should reflect the structure of the activities which have made up the course. In many courses which already include built-in forms of oral activity, such a situation already exists: the test design provides guidelines for rehearsal which are congruent with a range of communicative functions. This is simply not the case with the majority of courses leading to the 'SOT'. The conversation class or ancillary oral activities, taking place on the periphery of the course, often not carefully monitored by comparison with formal language classes, are the only preparation for the oral exam.

Whereas predictability can be said to cover design and overall content, the ability to cope with unexpected questions (speed of reaction, appropriacy of response) is clearly a basic and equally important feature of communication and should be expressly included in any comprehensive test rather than being present as the incidental accompaniment of a loosely structured interchange. As well as being an essential characteristic of oral interchange included in classwork, the 'unpredictability factor' contributes by definition to the test's 'face validity'.

The discussion surrounding the relative merits of construct versus content validity is of course only an extension of the more far-reaching controversy between the so-called 'componential' or 'discrete point' and 'unitary' or 'integrative' theories of language testing. It is clear that this argument has ramifications involving the process of foreign language acquisition itself, which the focus of this paper demands that we leave unexplored. Suffice to say that the designer of an alternative oral test at finals (or at any other level) inevitably has to face the question of whether the test should measure individual factors of performance (the 'atomistic' approach) or whether the examiner should rely on an 'integrative', even an 'intuitive' assessment of the candidate's oral ability.

The term 'discrete point' is susceptible to a narrow and a broad definition (Oller, 1979). In its narrow sense discrete point testing focuses on 'one point of grammar at a time'. If such is the aim of the test, oral interview is a very inefficient way of achieving one's objective. Generally for the purposes of oral testing, the term is interpreted more broadly as meaning linguistic components of oral performance. The division into categories of the FSI oral interview test: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, has

become recognised as the 'classic' example of a working compromise between discrete point testing according to its broader definition and a pragmatic approach.

Given the right conditions - properly trained examiners who are flexible and insightful in implementing the FSI instructions - there is no doubt that the componential approach advocated by the FSI has tangible advantages: proven reliability, a degree of construct validity, economy, and also 'generalisability' which Mothe describes as 'la mesure de la compétence langagière dans sa globalité.'[4]

However, apart from the evident vagueness of the terms 'fluency' and 'comprehension' as independent categories of performance, the very principle of the so-called 'divisibility hypothesis' has increasingly been questioned as a sound basis for increasing a test's reliability,

In addition to the findings of Callaway (1980) referred to above, a range of recent experiments give support to a 'unitary' rather than a 'componential' view of linguistic competence which is demonstrated (Scholz et al, 1980) by the high correlation between the results of tests related to individual skills and the collective results of eighteen different tests. As a result of their findings, Scholz et al posited a 'g' factor representing general language proficiency. They found, moreover, that it was difficult to relate any particular groups of tests to specific skill factors. Each factor had a significant correlation with a wide range of different tests. As Scholz et al concluded:

> No clear pattern appears in which tests are grouped according to the posited skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, or components of phonology, lexicon or grammar; the data seem to fit best with the unitary competence hypothesis; and the divisible component hypothesis is thus rejected.[5]

This view re-echoes Hendrick's et al comment that 'there is no evidence that the several FSI scales are measuring different skills or components of oral proficiency.'[6] So efforts on the part of oral examiners to achieve greater objectivity by 'factorising' oral tests in relation to specific features of competence seem to be misguided.

What is evident, however, in the nature of this conclusion is that the categories on which these experiments were based are, to a large extent, rooted in linguistic knowledge. They do not include the multiple pragmatic factors which govern the successful accomplishment of a communicative task (personality, coherence, use of accompanying material, complexity of content, etc). In short, the tests concerned do not evaluate performance skills; rather they assess only certain aspects of the proficiency which makes performance possible. As we have seen, even in the case of the FSI interview, the subcomponents of assessment: accent, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, are for the most part formal rather than pragmatic.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the FSI interview is more painstakingly designed than the SOT. The question is: does this make it a better test? The outcome of the controversy outlined above suggests that the answer may well be 'no'; even unplanned flexibility of content may be just as efficient a basis for assessment as the FSI's planned shift from informal discussion to professional interchange. The argument for extending or redesigning the SOT cannot rest simply on the urge to break down oral proficiency into linguistically based components. If an alternative approach to oral interview in the final examination is thought necessary, it needs to have an alternative theoretical justification, reflecting course design and based on pragmatic principles of validity.

3. FUNCTIONAL CRITERIA, COURSE OBJECTIVES AND TEST DESIGN

Having rejected the 'divisible' or 'componential' approach to oral test design based on linguistic criteria, it is tempting to seek justification for an alternative standpoint in what can be termed the authentic fallacy; given the constraints of examination procedure, how can an oral test replicate real life, and if it can, what aspect of real life should it represent? Both Alderson (1980) and Partington (1980) demonstrate the vacuity of the first part of this problem. An oral test does not seek to re-create the life outside; it is an authentic situation in its own right, the enactants being examiners and examinees. The test is not authentically validated by role-adoption but by criterion-referenced content, that is the tasks and interaction delineated for the test should incorporate functional elements which are transposable to another reality. This reality should in turn reflect the performance goals of the course as a whole. The functional elements correspond to a finite set of communicative needs and skills, themselves distilled from a potentially infinite range of authentic situations. For example the design features of part of an oral proficiency test for political analysts would be based in the first instance on a careful analysis of the expository and interpersonal elements in political discourse. These elements would then define the structure of a variably controlled interchange recognised by both participants as an examination situation. In this way, both 'generalisability' and 'predictive validity' can as far as possible be guaranteed, without false claims being made about the test's 'one to one' relationship with real life.

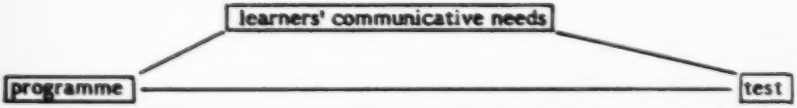
It follows that the principal aim in designing an alternative oral is to shift the emphasis from underlying features of competence or 'enabling skills' to functional components which define the successful, or unsuccessful, completion of a communicative task. The problem then becomes one of isolating such functions from a range of real-life tasks, building these into the language course, and designing a test which covers a range of functions which is representative of a more general oral proficiency.

At the same time, the obvious difficulty of separating linguistic 'enabling skills' from factors of performance is that performance is to a large extent evidenced through language. 'Appropriateness' and 'comprehensibility', for example, as factors of performance will rely heavily on 'accuracy' and 'accent'. To carry out communicative tasks beyond a certain level of

complexity depends inevitably on the prior acquisition of specific language skills. However, the successful completion of these tasks depends also on other, more pragmatic factors. A formal presentation may involve French which is entirely accurate, spoken with a perfect accent; but if the argument lacks coherence or relevance to the aims defined by the context, or if the language is too high-flown, esoteric, or alternatively, too casual, the communicative act has failed.

Primacy should, then, be given to the specification of 'functions', ie to stating exactly which features of communication are necessary for certain tasks to be successfully performed. The theoretical framework which best represents this relationship between context, function and linguistic realisation is that of Halliday (1973). Halliday suggests that within a given culture there is a finite set of 'situation types'. Each situation sets up a range of functional choices which are only at a further, final stage, realised in terms of grammatical structures.[7] The situation type 'meeting' for example gives rise to a whole range of definable initiatives and responses which may be more or less socially appropriate according to circumstances. These in turn involve linguistic choices with quite different syntactic structures. Bonjour, salut, ça va? Permettez-moi que je me présente, vous vous appelez? Ca fait longtemps qu'on s'est plus vu, etc. Within the context of a model of this kind the term 'function' can thus be defined as a speaker's communicative intention independent of the situation, even though the social or psychological constraints inherent in the context of any discourse inevitably narrow down the number of functional choices normally open to the individual participants. The task of the oral examiner, like that of the course designer, is therefore to identify a number of contexts or 'situation types' and a representative range of functional alternatives open to speakers in the light of what he feels to be the aims of the course.

It is quite clear therefore that if pragmatic tests of this kind are to be 'valid' without being 'situation tied', and if they are to have 'instructional value' that is an appropriate retroactive effect on teaching approaches, their format is to a large extent dependent on course objectives. Before designing an oral test at finals, it is essential to decide what the aims of a major degree course in French should be in terms of oral proficiency. This axiomatic principle, so often taken for granted or overlooked where the SOT is concerned, is clearly expressed by Brendan Carroll's diagram below:[8]



What are degree students' oral/aural communicative needs? Within the context of a major BA course of study I would define them as follows:

(a) Receptive

- formal report or objective theoretical analysis by an individual of a technical, moral, social, or political issue.
- formal discussion, debate at a given level of theoretical complexity.
- informal dialogue on everyday issues of personal concern between educated people (including narration of past events based on personal experience, personal opinions, feelings, etc)

The medium of reception would either be read text, audio recording or audio-visual media.

(b) Productive

- objective analysis: narration, description, analysis and evaluation of social, political, economic, literary, historical phenomena, assessment of their moral significance, exposition and evaluation of a theoretical, moral or technical problem.
- summarising/gist reporting of event or of analysis of contemporary or past issues.
- expression and analysis of feelings and personal impressions.
- appropriate initiation and response in formal and informal personal interaction.

(c) Interpreting

- an ability to translate orally at different levels of formality in order to facilitate communication between monolingual speakers of French and English. Naturalness and verisimilitude suggest that casual interpreting of this kind be consecutive.

In the light of course objectives such as these, the following oral exam formats could claim to be reliable, valid and economical:

(a) Oral/aural summary (two internal examiners)

- The exam, conducted in the language laboratory, consists of gist reports of two pieces of recorded oral French lasting three minutes each.
- The gist reports themselves should not last more than one minute.
- Fifteen minutes are allowed for each piece: ten minutes for listening and note-taking and five minutes for recording the students' own gist summary.
- Of the two pieces of recorded French, one should be an objective report or formal discussion, one a dialogue involving a more casually interpersonal and everyday problem.

Students should be marked impressionistically on a scale of 1 - 5 corresponding to standard degree classes with examiners paying particular attention to the following criteria:

- clarity and comprehensibility
- factual accuracy

- coherence
- appropriacy of vocabulary and idiom
- conciseness
- lexical variety
- syntactic accuracy.

(b) Oral interview (two examiners, one of which should be an external)

- The oral interview which lasts between twenty-five and thirty minutes comprises three distinct phases corresponding to three different types of context of discourse and giving rise to largely different sets of functional components.
- The students should have about twenty minutes to prepare a brief formal presentation on one of a limited set of topics which they would not know in advance but which would be related to material covered during the course. A very limited set of documentary information can also be supplied to provide a factual basis for the students' presentation.
- The interview should open by an exchange of pleasantries lasting for several minutes if necessary, to put the candidate at his/her ease.
- Phase 1 (five to eight minutes)

The student can refer to brief notes if required but should on no account read from a continuous text.

In the absence of a satisfactory theoretical definition of the term 'function' it is inevitable that there be differences in detail between individual examiners as to the precise set of functions implied by the task of a formal presentation and as to the relative importance ascribed to each. While not claiming to be comprehensive, the list below does seek to set out specific criteria to which examiners can give attention and which for students imply verbal techniques and linguistic knowledge that can be taught.

For Phase 1 of the oral interview, we are therefore seeking to evaluate in a global sense the following aspects of a student's performance:

> coherence, persuasion, expression, explanation, definition, description, emphasis, deduction, verification, modification, comparison, generalisation, introduction, argument, conclusion.

All these functions can be directly related to various aspects of language: on a general level comprehensibility, lexical variety and syntactic accuracy and, more specifically, such features of code as impersonal verbs, linking expressions, the strategic use of nominal and verbal constructions, appropriate use of the subjunctive, the position of adjectives, etc. At the same time, however, particular care should be taken to avoid the meaningless

regurgitation of stock phrases which are not appropriate to the argument or to the coherent development of content.

- Phase 2 (five to ten minutes)
The second phase of the interview involves a formal discussion of the issues raised in the presentation. The examiner asks questions which demand that the candidate modify, define, defend and justify his/her own points of view. This phase of the test is therefore a test of formal interpersonal communication. The candidate should show an ability to agree or disagree with the examiner within the formal norms of polite discussion, to concede certain points, but adhere to others on the basis of rational argument. An ability to imply and infer would be a further feature of communicative behaviour which this phase of the test would seek to evaluate.

- Phase 3 (five to ten minutes)
This phase of the interview focusses on the candidate's own personality and individual likes and dislikes, hopes and fears. It seeks to evaluate his/her powers of self-expression in the foreign language. The functions implied by this final stage of the interview might include:

> self-identification, narration, the expression of intention, hope, regret, fear, affection, satisfaction, hesitation, scepticism, etc.

Clearly the kind of linguistic knowledge demanded during this phase includes among other things an appropriate range of verbs of feeling and adjectives and in particular an ability to manipulate tense and mood.

Each phase would be marked impressionistically by each examiner out of 5 during the test and at the end a set of three marks each out of 5 agreed on. Together with the two marks from the oral gist test, the aggregate gives a total out of 25. The likelihood of parity between pairs of examiners is increased by internal examiners changing places at half-day intervals and thereby moderating obvious differences in level between externals. In the light of the conclusive evidence of Mullen's (1980) investigation into rater reliability, it is commonsense to ensure that oral interview tests are conducted by a minimum of two examiners.

In addition, it is worth noting with regard to courses in which consecutive interpreting plays a significant part, that it is relatively simple to introduce this activity into phases two and three of the above exam format, provided of course that the two examiners are temperamentally able to suspend their knowledge of one of the two languages for the purposes of the exam. This technique is already current in the FSI interview, though in that instance it is mainly used as a means of eliciting vocabulary and syntactic structures.[9]

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRAGMATIC TESTS AND THE LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

If finals oral tests reflect certain course objectives it is logical that they should also corroborate language activities carried out during the course. Indeed the attendance and interest shown in oral approaches at the Bradford conference is a measure of the feeling that the emphasis of language courses in higher education should shift in the direction of oral skills.

Although it is outside the scope of this paper to consider questions of teaching methodology in any detail, developments in approaches to oral evaluation and the design of the test which has been presented above presuppose learning activities which arise out of tasks tackled collectively by small groups and which lead to oral as well as written performance.

Regardless of the nature of the content: commercial case study, a current French socio-political issue, an everyday moral or personal problem encountered in France or elsewhere, we would propose as one possible methodological framework an approach involving three stages:

1. Analysis
2. Enaction
3. Exploitation/consolidation

The approach is best summed up by the schema below:

Stage 1: Analysis. Students work in groups of 5 or 6 on a range of material: documentary, audio-recorded, audio-visual, relating to a specific theme. They note vocabulary, carry out written commentaries and exercises and, particularly where audio-visual material is concerned, complete questionnaires. Using one of their own members as an interpreter, they also address questions to a native speaker on the topic under consideration using the documentary input as a point of departure.

Stage 2: Enaction. This involves the preparation and performance of the principal oral output; a problem or scenario is conceived by students and elaborated with roles being ascribed within the group. At both Stages 1 and 2 writing is an integral part of the group's activities and complements the build-up to the oral enaction which constitutes the main goal of Stage 2. This latter invariably includes an element of formal presentation and interpreting can also be built into the enaction at this stage.

Stage 3: Exploitation/consolidation. This Stage takes the form of follow-up written exercises: translation, summary, report writing, letters, etc, carried out individually rather than in groups and assessed according to traditional precepts of accuracy and stylistic appropriateness.

STAGE 1: ANALYSIS		
Input: film (10 minutes) TV document (10 mins) written texts	Student activity: linguistic and cultural analysis in groups of 5-6; interpreting	Output: written commentary summary syntactic/lexical exercises; completed questionnaires

STAGE 2: ENACTION		
Preparation: research scenario production	Performance: 25 mins approx recorded on audio or video tape	Evaluation correction/marking of tapes

STAGE 3: EXPLOITATION/CONSOLIDATION	
Written exercises: translation letter report summary, etc	Evaluation: content coherence fluency lexical variety accuracy

The amount of time devoted to a single complete cycle of this kind depends on the organisation of the institution concerned. Within the context of a university course involving two formal language classes per week, the whole process covers approximately one month. Under more intensive learning conditions, it could obviously be completed much more rapidly.

The success of the approach is dependent on an extended and collaborative relationship between teacher and student. The students need to be psychologically prepared for the demands which independent group work and recorded enaction place on them. A build-up of at least four weeks through traditional exposés, simple improvisations and interpreting exercises is needed to bring committed university students to the point where they are ready to take on responsibility for their own course. The period of habituation will clearly vary according to the age and ability of the students concerned and to other external factors affecting course organisation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of proposing an approach in which pedagogical responsibility is largely transferred to the learner and greater place is given to the spoken language has been to illustrate the necessary inter-relationship between the content and learning activities of BA language courses and a more carefully designed final oral examination. The recommendations below are therefore put forward in lieu of a conclusion as suggestions which, if adopted (as many of them already have been prior to this conference), would surely be applied in different ways by different institutions. Hopefully however, these varied responses would reflect a common concern that the teaching of oral French should receive greater attention than at present within the standard structure of the BA modern languages degree:

1. Increase weighting of language in general to 50% of the marks awarded for French with the finals structure.

2. Extend the oral examination to 30 minutes. This should include:
   (a) presentation based on a briefly prepared topic,
   (b) formal question and answer and/or interpreting exercise,
   (c) general personal discussion.

3. Introduce an additional oral paper explicitly to test receptive and oral summarising skills.

4. Ensure that there are two examiners per student for the oral interview with internal examiners acting as moderators by changing at regular intervals.

5. Integrate the skills practised in the exam into formally assessed coursework.

6. Where possible, devolve responsibility on to students for the exploitation of materials, enaction and evaluation.

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9. See 3 above.

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